

1975

Woman's Rights in Virginia, 1909-1920

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WOMAN'S RIGHTS IN VIRGINIA

11

1909 - 1920

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of History
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by

Alice Matthews Erickson

1975

APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts



Alice Matthews Erickson

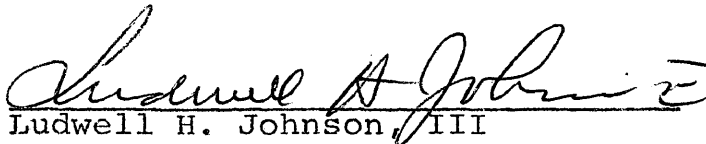
Approved, May 1975



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ABSTRACT

The idea for this study originated with the question, what was the woman's rights movement like in Virginia? The results of the subsequent investigation are embodied in this paper which delineates the extent to which Virginia women participated in the woman movement, explores the "woman on a pedestal" attitude as it affected the suffrage cause in the Commonwealth, and examines the reasons behind the rejection of the Nineteenth Amendment by the Virginia General Assembly.

The investigation was ^{Limitation} limited to the years between 1909 and 1920 for several reasons. "The first effective suffrage organization in the state was formed in 1909 and enlisted thousands of Virginia women in the campaign for woman suffrage and related reforms. In the years following 1909 woman suffrage became a major issue in the nation and in Virginia. This study concludes with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment and the winning of suffrage in 1920 because it represented the end of an era. Suffrage was the rallying cry and this point had been won. The effects and results of enfranchisement are properly the object of a new investigation.

Virginia women did depart from tradition when they entered the political arena. They were led by Lila Meade Valentine of Richmond, and were white, middle class women who believed in the gentility which was their heritage and who conducted themselves accordingly. Opposition did come from those who considered that "a woman's place is in the home," but the real difficulty in the legislature came from the prospect of enfranchising Negro women and from the desire on the part of the Democratic party leadership to retain a small, controlled electorate.

The General Assembly of Virginia rejected the Nineteenth Amendment, but with the national ratification Virginia women were given equal suffrage. They had both won and lost.

WOMAN'S RIGHTS IN VIRGINIA

1909 - 1920

CHAPTER I

ORIGINS AND RATIONALE

On November 13, 1909, the Richmond Times Dispatch printed a small article, halfway down and in the middle of an interior page, with the heading "Suffragettes Here-- Movement Started to Organize Branch of National Order."¹ This unspectacular announcement was to have a widespread effect, for it brought to light the intentions of a group of prominent Richmond women to involve themselves in the effort to achieve for women the right to vote. Their action marked a departure from the Virginia tradition of the "moral influence" of women in regard to social and political issues.

The movement which the women were to join was several generations old in 1909. In the early nineteenth century isolated programs appeared here and there, but the essentials of organization, leadership and a program were missing. "These were to be the achievement of the Seneca Falls convention in the summer of 1848, from which the

¹Times Dispatch (Richmond, Virginia), November 13, 1909, p. 8.

inception of the woman's rights movement in the United States is commonly dated."²

After the Civil War, the women who had participated in the Seneca Falls convention believed that their requests for equal rights and the vote would receive a favorable hearing by the Republican party. These women, all abolitionists, had worked hard in the war effort. "To their dismay and disillusionment, the [Republican] party leaders informed them that 'this is the Negro's hour' and that the women must wait for their rights."³ When the word male was used in the United States Constitution for the first time, in the Fourteenth Amendment, suffragists had to decide whether or not to work for its adoption. The women were divided on this and other issues, and in 1869 formed two organizations: the National Woman Suffrage Association, and the American Woman Suffrage Association. By 1890, however, "lacking any continuing basic disagreement on principle or tactics,"⁴ the two groups merged into the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). This was the organization which eventually brought hundreds of thousands of American women into the suffrage movement.

²Eleanor Flexner, Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 71.

³Aileen S. Kraditor, The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), p. 3.

⁴Flexner, p. 220.

By 1890, the application of the industrial revolution to the traditional tasks of the home and the appearance of smaller families combined to free American women from many of their household tasks and to provide more leisure time. Women from all levels of society began to organize to further various worthy causes and many joined the woman's rights movement.

Woman suffrage was not yet generally accepted, but it was no longer considered the province of eccentrics and crackpots. It boasted influential friends in Congress, and the annual conventions of the National Association in Washington were the occasion, not only of hearings before Congressional committees and lobbying 'on the hill,' but of White House teas and receptions.⁵

Women in the South were slow to organize for any purpose because of their upbringing and peculiar cultural heritage,⁶ and this was especially true in the case of suffrage. By the mid-nineties the climate was changing, and "some degree of suffrage organization had taken place in every southern state."⁷ Certain characteristics marked the southern movement however, and gave it a distinctive regional coloring. First, women stressed the importance of retaining the ladylike demeanor which was their heritage. "An unpleasant aggressiveness will doubtless be expected of us," a Mississippi leader once

⁵Ibid., p. 218.

⁶Anne Firor Scott, The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930 (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), chapter 6 and passim.

⁷Ibid., p. 177.

warned; "let us endeavor to disappoint such expectations."⁸ Secondly, there was the race question brought about by the possibility of enfranchising the Negro woman. This question was never satisfactorily answered and when the federal woman suffrage amendment was ratified in 1920, only four southern states, Arkansas, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Texas, voted for adoption. Two of these, Kentucky and Tennessee, are actually border states and none of the "solid south" joined the ranks.⁹

The suffrage associations in the South were affiliated with the national organization, NAWSA, which had become more conservative in the last years of the nineteenth century.¹⁰ The arguments now used for woman suffrage fell into two basic categories: natural rights, and expediency. The natural rights argument followed the reasoning that "in a free country to deny women the vote solêly because of their sex was unjust, undemocratic, and ought properly to have been unconstitutional."¹¹ Beyond this, and used increasingly after the turn of the century, the expediency or functional argument stressed what women could do with the ballot.¹² The NAWSA also had settled upon a policy

⁸Ibid., quoted on page 180.

⁹Flexner, pp. 317-323.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 217.

¹¹William L. O'Neill, Everyone Was Brave (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, Inc., 1969), p. 49.

¹²Kraditor, chapter three.

regarding the tactics to be used in gaining the right to vote. "The women had no choice but to embark on a relentless educational campaign and to rely on their ability to persuade as many voters as possible to vote for state suffrage amendments."¹³ The state amendment route was to be costly, in time and effort, and largely futile.

Altogether there were 480 campaigns to induce state legislators to submit amendments to their electorates; 277 campaigns to persuade state party conventions to include woman suffrage planks in their platforms; 19 campaigns with 19 successive congresses; and the ratification campaign of 1919 and 1920. Between 1869 and 1916 there were 41 state amendment campaigns, with 9 victories and 32 defeats.¹⁴

In 1914 a group of younger NAWSA members, led by Alice Paul, broke away from the national association because they believed that the time had come to "exert irresistible pressure on Congress to pass the federal [suffrage] amendment."¹⁵ This group became the Woman's Party and purposefully retained a small and active membership. Their strategy was to campaign in Washington and to use the votes of Western women to prove to the men in Congress that it was in their own self interest to support the federal amendment. They even campaigned against sympathetic Democratic congressmen in order to "punish" the Democratic

¹³Ibid., p. 220.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 9.

Party for opposing national woman suffrage. When these measures failed to influence Congress on the suffrage question, the Woman's Party turned to militancy. Their militant tactics consisted mainly of picketing the White House (a novel idea in those days) and of using inflammatory slogans on their banners. During the early days of World War I slogans such as "Kaiser Wilson" displayed at the White House gates provoked angry response from onlookers and when violence broke out the pickets were arrested. Their actions and subsequent arrests brought much publicity to the cause of woman suffrage, but it cannot be concluded that they won new support in Congress.¹⁶ Meanwhile, in 1916 the NAWSA, under the leadership of Carrie Chapman Catt, adopted a new policy advocating the federal amendment, but used the state auxiliaries in an organized campaign to achieve their objective. Most NAWSA leaders were "extremely hostile" toward the Woman's Party and its tactics,¹⁷ but both groups were now working toward the same goal.

When the Virginia women formed their organization in 1909 limited suffrage had already been won, mostly in the West, for school elections. In 1887 women in Kansas received the municipal suffrage. Full suffrage was first achieved in the territory of Wyoming in 1869, and when

¹⁶Flexner, pp. 282-287.

¹⁷Kraditor, p. 10.

Wyoming became a state in 1890 political equality for women was retained. Colorado enfranchised women in 1893, followed by Utah and Idaho in 1896,¹⁸ but then began a long period called the "doldrums" in which no further victories were won. In the years just prior to 1910,

interest in the Federal woman-suffrage amendment was at an alltime low. The annual hearings on the bill before Senate and House Committees had become routine, since nothing was expected to come of them. Woman suffrage had not been debated on the floor of the Senate since 1887, and had never reached the floor of the House; the suffrage bill had not received a favorable committee report in either house since 1893, and no report at all since 1896.¹⁹

Why, in such an unfavorable atmosphere, did the Richmond women seek to participate in this movement? Part of the answer can be found in the statement issued by the Woman's Suffrage League to the Times Dispatch following the announcement of their plans to organize. "As Virginia women and thinking entities they feel they have no right to stand aside in the world-wide movement in which their sex is engaged."²⁰ The statement maintained that the social and economic order of society was changing, and that when the proper time came, the "just, liberal and fair-minded men of the Old Dominion"²¹ would see that women were given their rights. The sincerity of these women was

¹⁸Flexner, chapter XI and Kraditor, p. 4.

¹⁹Flexner, p. 262.

²⁰Times Dispatch, November 14, 1909, p. D11.

²¹Ibid.

evidenced by the fact that they had been working quietly but purposefully since the spring of that year. At that time, the first meeting of the Richmond Woman's Suffrage League was held at the home of novelist Ellen Glasgow. She had invited friends to meet Laura Clay, a suffragist from Kentucky²² who was in town visiting her sister. During tea they discussed woman suffrage and become so enthusiastic that they drew up and signed, then and there, a petition to be sent to Congress urging that an amendment to the national Constitution be adopted which would enable women to vote. By November 1909 the group was ready to organize officially and begin a campaign to enlist others in their cause. Lila Meade Valentine, an advocate of social and educational reform and a member of a prominent Richmond family, was elected president, committees were appointed, "suitable rooms, to be used as league headquarters and for the establishment of a bureau of information"²³ were found, and plans were made to bring to Richmond an American suffrage leader, "preferably from a State where woman's suffrage is already in successful

²² Anne Firor Scott identifies Laura Clay in the following manner: "Through the seventies and eighties, however, a few indefatigable women kept the fires [of suffrage] alive. In Kentucky the four Clay sisters--Mary, Anne, Sallie, and Laura--were virtually a suffrage organization in themselves." The Southern Lady, p. 173.

²³ Times Dispatch, November 21, 1909, p. 11. The rooms were in the Commercial Building, Second Street between Broad and Grace. The headquarters was later moved to 100 North Fourth Street.

operation."²⁴ The organization changed its name to the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia and affiliated with the National American Woman Suffrage Association.

When the Times Dispatch printed the announcement of the intentions of a group of Richmond women to organize a suffrage movement, the writer commented that:

similar movements in Virginia have always failed to accomplish anything more than a publication of proposed plans. One [of the women] said the time is now ripe for action, and with concerted effort something tangible will be accomplished.²⁵

A woman who called herself a grandmother in relation to the suffrage movement, having joined it twenty or more years earlier, said that she saw no reason why this effort would not succeed since "the campaign is moving briskly."²⁶ "Brisk," "efficient," and "concerned" are all words which could be applied to the work of the league even in its earliest days. The headquarters was open each afternoon from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m., except Sunday, to receive visitors, to dispense suffrage information, and to encourage affiliation with the Richmond League, or to offer assistance in forming associations in other Virginia communities. The League's bureau of information released the news on December 6 that the capitol city's organization was "soon to be joined by branches in Radford, Roanoke, Petersburg,

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid., November 13, 1909, p. 8.

²⁶Ibid., December 6, 1909, p. 10.

and Lynchburg. The Radford movement sprang from the visit of a Radford woman to Richmond last spring."²⁷ The group of women who had departed from tradition in becoming suffragists were determined that their effort would be successful. At the first annual convention, in the summer of 1910, Mrs. Valentine reported that from an initial membership of about twenty, the organization had grown to approximately 200. Successful efforts in establishing affiliated suffrage leagues were reported in Norfolk, Alexandria, Staunton, Bedford, and the University of Virginia. Plans for the coming year included "registration of League members, and signing the legislative petition [asking that the Virginia State Constitution be amended to permit woman suffrage] to be presented to the Virginia Assembly in 1912."²⁸ With this declaration of active interest and determined effort, the movement for woman's rights took a permanent place in the life of Virginia.

The rationale underlying the decision to join in the suffrage movement was that of seeking political recognition of woman's rights. But there was also another determining factor. Lila Meade Valentine had for some time prior to 1909 been concerned with attempts to bring about reform in

²⁷Ibid., p. 10, separate article.

²⁸Equal Suffrage League of Virginia Yearbook, 1910
(Richmond, Virginia: 1910), p. 8.

the fields of education and health. Several of these attempts had failed completely or had died of inaction. She became convinced that the only way that women could have an effective voice in achieving a better standard of living for Virginians was to seek an amendment to the state constitution which would give women the right to vote. Other women had faced this situation before and had reached the same conclusion. Jane Addams, social worker and founder of Hull House in Chicago, wrote an article in 1909 for the Ladies' Home Journal entitled "Why Women Should Vote." In this article she stated that "as society grew more complicated it was necessary that women should extend their sense of responsibility to many things outside their own homes if they wanted to preserve their homes."²⁹ Mrs. Valentine also expressed this new philosophy of suffragism when she wrote:

There is a whole group of interests which belong peculiarly to women and which with the expanding functions of government have become political questions and which therefore demand political handling. Questions concerning food, water, sanitation, education, light, heat, plumbing, treatment of diseases, child labor, hours of labor for women and children. . . .All these questions. . . .concern the home and the child. . . .City, State, and National governments now manage our homes and their surroundings (whether we will or not). The interests of no class and people can be safely left to any other class. . . .each class should be given the power of protecting its own interests.³⁰

²⁹Quoted in Kraditor, p. 68.

³⁰Quoted in the program for the "Unveiling of Lila Meade Valentine Memorial," October 20, 1936, Virginia Woman Suffrage Papers, 1910-1925, Virginia State Library, Archives Division, Box 1. [Hereafter referred to as Woman Suffrage Papers.]

Mrs. Valentine was instrumental in bringing about the formation of the Equal Suffrage League as a means of achieving this goal. Only after repeated failure to gain more than a cursory hearing in the Virginia Assembly did she and the League, following the 1916 NAWSA policy, turn to advocating the Susan B. Anthony Amendment to the federal Constitution.³¹

This combination of suffrage and social reform was made the basis for the existence of the woman's rights movement in the state. In a classic statement of the expediency argument, the suffragist "grandmother" stated that "today's woman wants to get to the principle of the things, and desires to go to the polls solely for the good that she can do in asserting herself in a way that may subserve the best interests of a community."³² Evidence of these practical goals is seen in the following resolutions adopted by the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia on November 14, 1917.

The Seventh Annual Convention reasserts the purpose of its existence; namely to safeguard and advance the educational, industrial and legal rights and interests of women, and to obtain for women the franchise on equal terms with men.

It reaffirms its previous endorsement of state-wide compulsory education, Juvenile courts, the maintenance of proper court and prison officials for the care of women and children offenders, equal guardianship for both parents, the eight hour working day, a

³¹Lloyd Chamberlain Taylor, "Lila Meade Valentine: The FFV as Reformer," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, LXX (1962), p. 486.

³²Times Dispatch, December 6, 1909, p. 10.

minimum wage law, national health legislation with competent enforcement, and raising the age of protection to eighteen years, and vigilant aid in food conservation.

Because of the entry of the United States into war and the substitution of women for men in every known occupation, the convention wishes to emphasize the principle of equal pay for equal work in all trades, businesses and professions; to reaffirm its desire for the institution of a college for the higher education of women co-ordinated with the University of Virginia, and declares an ardent sympathy with the proposed opening of the Medical College of Virginia to women students, the admission of women to the bar in Virginia, and the enactment of such legislation as will enable women to serve on the school boards.³³

Such was the wide range of interests to which the Equal Suffrage League gave its attention. The implementation of this complex program would require herculean effort on the part of both the leaders and general membership of the statewide organization. The methods used to promote the activities of the League and to gain a hearing in the legislature were varied and will be discussed later. First, an examination must be made of the Virginian idea of the proper way to conduct a suffrage campaign, since the atmosphere thus created would permeate every area of activity. In regard to militancy, there was uniform agreement among the leadership, and their influence can be presumed to have had a positive effect on the Leagues scattered across the state. The Equal Suffrage League of Virginia, in its official policy, was unalterably opposed to the militant methods associated with the woman's rights

³³Woman Suffrage Papers, Box 1.

movement abroad and across the United States. This attitude is reflected in the League's response to the announcement of its formation in the Times Dispatch, which they said was unauthorized and premature. Because of its sudden and unexpected introduction to the community the League was "thrust forward prematurely into a fierce light of publicity that was both unsought and undesired."³⁴ The sensational method of drawing attention to an area of complaint was not to be a part of the League program. Over and over again, throughout the years, the same negative attitude is expressed toward militant suffragism. A 1909 newspaper item, referring to the English militant suffrage leader, Emily Pankhurst, read that "while they [the League] thoroughly believe in her sincerity of purpose, they do not indorse her militant methods."³⁵ Mrs. Valentine wrote to the Norfolk League president in 1914 that while the women from that area were free to go to Washington to march in the suffrage parade, it was, in her "humble opinion," a wiser policy to remain at home and exercise a quiet, educational influence on their Congressmen.³⁶ The Seventh Annual Convention, meeting in 1917, issued the following statement: "resolved that while we recognize the conscientious motives of the

³⁴Times Dispatch, November 14, 1909, p. D11.

³⁵Ibid., p. D14.

³⁶Lila Meade Valentine to Mrs. C. E. Townsend, April 13, 1914, Woman Suffrage Papers, Box 1.

National Woman's Party in picketing the White House, we deplore and condemn their methods."³⁷

This expression of preference for remaining within the Virginia tradition of quality and gentility of womanhood is seen also in the selection of speakers asked to present the woman's viewpoint in the city of Richmond. The League in 1909 rejected Mrs. Pankhurst as a speaker and accepted Dr. Anna Howard Shaw, President of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. Educated as a minister and a doctor, she spoke eloquently but with reasonableness.³⁸ In 1917, two women who had been arrested and put in jail for picketing the White House were asked to speak in Richmond. The statement given to the paper barely acknowledged this fact, however. Instead it devoted two paragraphs to the educational degrees of the women, and noted that Lucy Branham's "knowledge of languages was of great value in the prison, as the suffragists instituted a school of languages in which French, German, Russian, Spanish, and English were taught."³⁹ Another speaker in 1917, Nellie McClung of Canada, emphasized the need for pensioning dependent mothers who were unable to provide for their families, so that the homes could be held together, "because we believe that a

³⁷Woman Suffrage Papers, Box 1.

³⁸Times Dispatch, December 11, 1909, p. 8.

³⁹Ibid., December 1, 1917, p. 10.

mother is of more service to her family than a dozen institutions."⁴⁰

Thus the Virginia women who joined the national suffrage movement retained their distinctive Southern characteristics. The atmosphere created by the Equal Suffrage League was that of womanliness, but it was laced with intelligence, and bound up with determination. Virginia leaders had a realistic view of their chances of success in seeking enfranchisement. They knew that "success depends upon showing their cause to be compatible with the essentials of the Virginia tradition of womanliness."⁴¹ The ladylike image was not a ploy used merely to achieve success. These women were ladies and believed in their traditions. They prized that "certain delicacy of femininity which, when all is said, remains one of the chief assets of woman, of the new era as of the old."⁴² Novelist Mary Johnston of Richmond said that because of the Virginia tradition of emphasis on the quality rather than the quantity of voters, the state "had lagged behind other states in adopting universal manhood suffrage."⁴³

⁴⁰Ibid., December 5, 1917, p. 8.

⁴¹Orie Lathan Hatcher, "The Virginia Man and the New Era for Women," Nation, 106 (1 June 1918): 651.

⁴²Ibid., p. 652.

⁴³Elizabeth Dabney Coleman, "Penwoman of Virginia's Feminists," Virginia Cavalcade, VI, No. 3 (Winter 1956), p. 8.

The women of Virginia were determined that the legislators in the General Assembly would not have the opportunity to deny to women the right to vote because of a lack of quality. That they were not successful was not the fault of the framework in which they chose to act. As will be shown in a later section, Virginia was unlikely to grant woman suffrage regardless of the methods employed by its adherents, but the "quiet, educational" campaign of the League did win many friends, men and women, to accept its program.

CHAPTER II

LEADERS AND ACTION

Of the many Virginia women who took the cause of woman suffrage to the General Assembly and the men of the Commonwealth, three will be discussed at length because of their special contributions. Lila Meade Valentine (February 4, 1865 - July 14, 1921) was the organizer and commanding general. Ellen Glasgow (April 22, 1873 - November 21, 1945) was the important personage brought in for special campaigns. Mary Johnston (November 21, 1870 - May 9, 1936) was the propagandizer. As will be seen, these women had much in common beside their support of woman's rights.

(1)

Lila Meade Valentine was intimately associated with the Equal Suffrage League from its inception and can realistically be called its guiding light through the years. The daughter of Richard and Kate Fontaine Meade, she was born in Richmond just a few months before Grant's army entered the city. Her husband later recorded a seemingly prophetic incident which occurred at this time.

In 1865 a young woman, Kate Fontaine Meade, stood at the window of her home watching the destruction by fire of the downtown section of Richmond. In her

arms she held her three months old daughter, Lila. . . . The baby stretched out her little hand against the window pane just as it was shattered by the force of an explosion in the city. So was shattered the civilization into which she was born.¹ Her hands were to help build a new civilization.

As a girl, Lila Hardaway Meade developed a passion for knowledge but had to settle for a formal education befitting a young lady about to take her place in society. She had three younger brothers to be educated and as her father was not wealthy, neither the family finances nor convention permitted her to go to college. Not content to let her mind remain idle, however, she sought to educate herself from the books in her father's library.² Later, her husband arranged for her to be tutored privately by professors from the University of Virginia and the University of Richmond. "Her interests ran the gamut of scholarship, but her real talent was literature."³ This talent would later find practical expression in letter writing and speech making on behalf of her fellow Virginians.

Three men were influential in her life because they allowed her to develop as an individual personality. Her

¹Quoted in the program for the "Unveiling of Lila Meade Valentine Memorial," October 20, 1936, Virginia Woman Suffrage Papers, 1910-1925, Virginia State Library, Archives Division, Box 1. [Hereafter referred to as Woman Suffrage Papers.]

²Lloyd Chamberlain Taylor, "Lila Meade Valentine," Notable American Women, 1607-1950, Vol. III (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 504.

³Lloyd Chamberlain Taylor, "Lila Meade Valentine: The FFV as Reformer," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, LXX (1962), p. 471.

father had encouraged her to acquire knowledge. Her father-in-law "approved her use of the name Lila Meade Valentine rather than Mrs. Benjamin B. Valentine; he saw no virtue in the anonymity imposed on (and even eagerly embraced by many) women of the time."⁴ Her husband shared her social consciousness and recognized her qualifications for leadership in the area of reform. Since both husband and wife "had inherited the aristocratic tradition of the ante-bellum South and grown up during the turbulent days of Reconstruction, they had a distinct feeling of responsibility to the transitional society in which they lived."⁵ Her concern for people on all levels of society led her into educational reform where she worked for better school facilities, a kindergarten program, and Negro education. Speaking on the purpose of the Richmond Education Association, which she helped to form, she said:

The people of Richmond must be convinced . . . must realize that although we are growing in wealth, that growth will be greater and its foundations the surer, if our children, all of them, white and black, are trained in head and heart and hand, not only to do the work that cries out to be done in the material upbuilding of our city, but also to become the intelligent, self-respecting, law-abiding citizens who shall make impossible the inefficiency, bribery, and corruption that are disgracing so many American communities today.⁶

⁴Elizabeth Dabney Coleman, "Genteel Crusader," Virginia Cavalcade, IV, No. 2 (1954), p. 29.

⁵Taylor, "FFV as Reformer," p. 472.

⁶Richmond Times Dispatch, August 31, 1902. Quoted by Taylor, p. 474.

Although Mrs. Valentine never advocated social equality with Negroes, her support of their right to an equal education would be used against her in the struggle for woman suffrage. In 1903, she was instrumental in having the Southern Education Board meet in Richmond. The Times Dispatch observed:

A notable fact about the audience last night was that for the first time, so far as is known, in the postbellum history of Richmond, whites and blacks sat side by side in the same public hall, with no line of demarkation.⁷

Such an occasion would be remembered during the controversy over Negro women and the franchise.

Mrs. Valentine's interest in reform had led her into the suffrage movement, and she kept this interest alive in spite of the heavy duties of leadership in the League. "Her plea for the elimination of sweat shops gained the Equal Suffrage League the support of labor leaders, but helped her reputation of an iconoclast and a radical."⁸ Besides expressing her concern for the working conditions of women and children, she and the Equal Suffrage League repeatedly endorsed the demand for "the institution of a college for the higher education of women."⁹ She could personally attest to the need for such an institution.

Mrs. Valentine continued her work for reform in the face of open opposition and as the target of self-styled

⁷Times Dispatch, April 25, 1903.

⁸Taylor, "FFV as Reformer," p. 483.

⁹Woman Suffrage Papers, Box 1.

moralists. As president of the Equal Suffrage League¹⁰ she could have restricted her activity to administrative duties, but this was not her nature. In spite of poor health she kept up an extremely active schedule of speaking engagements around the state, traveling by car, train, and boat, staying with friends when possible, and in hotels when it was necessary. Her correspondence, mostly handwritten, with individuals in city and county suffrage leagues shows how closely she kept in touch with the work in many parts of the Commonwealth. The tone of these letters is not authoritarian, but she does not hesitate to give advice or to offer guidance concerning the best methods to be used in achieving their goals.¹¹

The National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) also benefited from Mrs. Valentine's abilities as a leader and as a speaker. In 1916 Mrs. Catt appointed her to the all-important Congressional Committee in the reorganization of NAWSA for the final push toward carrying the federal suffrage amendment through Congress.¹² At the 1916 national convention she addressed the assembly during an evening session on the topic "For Woman Herself,"

¹⁰She was first elected president at the organizational meeting in 1909 and held that position continuously until her death in 1921.

¹¹Woman Suffrage Papers, Box 1.

¹²Ida Husted Harper (ed.), History of Woman Suffrage, Vol. V (New York: National American Woman Suffrage Association, 1922), p. 506.

which expressed the "highest reasons" for enfranchising women.

Just as long as woman remains under guardianship, as if she were a minor or an incompetent--just so long as she passively accepts at the hands of men conditions, usages, laws, as if they were decrees of Providence--just so long as she is deprived of the educative responsibilities of self-government--by just so much does she fall short of complete development as a human being and retard the progress of the race.¹³

Mrs. Valentine kept to her schedule as rigidly as her health would permit, but several times after 1904 she was ordered by her doctors to stop everything and leave Richmond for a complete rest of a month or two. She would return to work as vigorously as ever, but she was gradually wearing herself out. In the summer of 1920 she was very ill. When suffrage was finally won in August of that year, the city registrar went to her home so that she could register to vote, but on election day she was too ill to go to the polls.¹⁴ She died the following summer having never cast a ballot. On October 20, 1936, a memorial plaque honoring Lila Meade Valentine was unveiled in the Hall of the House of Delegates and placed alongside those of other distinguished Virginians. She is the only woman to be so honored. Beneath her name and the dates of her life are the words:

¹³Ibid., pp. 492-493.

¹⁴Woman Suffrage Papers, Box 1.

Great in Mind and Soul
And in Service to Humanity
Leader in Virginia
for the
Enfranchisement of Women¹⁵

(2)

Ellen Glasgow fitted naturally into the woman movement. She had determined as a child to succeed in a profession dominated by men. "From the beginning she never wavered in her conviction that her role in life was to write novels--important novels."¹⁶ She was born on April 22, 1873, the eighth of ten children born to Francis T. Glasgow and Anne Jane Gholson Glasgow. Her father was the manager of the Tredegar Iron Works in Richmond, which began a financial decline in the 1870's and 1880's, bringing "relative poverty for the Glasgow family, which was still increasing."¹⁷ Ellen's childhood was rather lonely because poor health made her an observer rather than a participant in children's games. A certain happiness did come with the summers spend on Jerdone Castle, the family estate outside Richmond, but the farm was sold when Ellen was fourteen. Her father then bought the house

¹⁵Times Dispatch, October 21, 1936, p. 1.

¹⁶Louis Auchincloss, Ellen Glasgow (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1964), p. 7.

¹⁷E. Stanley Godbold, Ellen Glasgow and the Woman Within (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1972), p. 13.

at One Main Street which was to be Ellen's home for the rest of her life.¹⁸

Ellen seemed to have inherited the stubbornness of her Scotch-Irish father and the nervous temperament of her Tidewater mother. She was, in fact, too nervous to go regularly to school,¹⁹ so she educated herself by "reading all the books in the family library, science and history as well as fiction and poetry."²⁰ She grew up to write those important novels and brought to them an irony which expressed her revolt against "the false, affected, and pretentious in Southern writing."²¹ She criticized her southern heritage and yet her effectiveness in delineating character and theme arose from her love for, not bitterness toward, her native state. She was a Virginian.

Ellen Glasgow had already gained a reputation as an author when in 1909 she invited some women to her Richmond home to discuss the suffrage movement. In her memoirs she remembered "the timid yet courageous air with which the few bold spirits arrived, glancing round, as they ascended

¹⁸Ellen Glasgow, The Woman Within (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1954), chapter 6.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 42-50.

²⁰Auchincloss, p. 5.

²¹Joan Foster Santas, Ellen Glasgow's American Dream (Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1965), p. 2.

the front steps, to assure themselves that no strayed male was watching them."²² Laura Clay was visiting the Glasgow home at this time, and it was for her that the tea was arranged. She gave to the Richmond ladies the sum of \$2.50 which had been left in the treasury of an abortive 1893 Virginia suffrage organization. The money had been left in a trust fund for future use.²³ Several days after this tea the Virginia League for Woman Suffrage was organized "in the charming Victorian drawing room of Mrs. Clayton Glanville Coleman."²⁴ Ellen and her sister Cary visited Lila Meade Valentine the next day to ask her to undertake the leadership of this fledgling organization.

After long hesitation, the group had decided that Lila was the one and only woman who combined the requisite courage and intelligence. Her health was delicate, but a pure white flame burned within her, and she possessed the inexhaustible patience of which victors and martyrs are made.²⁵

If Ellen Glasgow had done nothing more for Virginia woman suffrage than enlist Mrs. Valentine in the cause, her contribution would have been significant. She had first become interested in suffrage when she was visiting in England and had even marched in an English suffrage parade, but this particular advocacy never won her complete enthusiasm. When Cary, her beloved elder sister

²²Glasgow, p. 185.

²³History of Woman Suffrage, Vol. VI, p. 665.

²⁴Glasgow, p. 185.

²⁵Ibid., p. 186.

died in 1911, she felt that her "own feeling for every cause on earth, except the need to prevent or alleviate mortal agony, was extinguished."²⁶ Her contribution was not ended here, however. In her autobiography she recorded that

If women wanted a vote, I agreed they had a right to vote, for I regarded the franchise in our Republic more as a right than as a privilege; and I was willing to do anything, except burn with a heroic blaze, for the watchword of liberty.²⁷

She may not have burned, but she did send up sparks. She did not hesitate to have her name appear in connection with the Equal Suffrage League and even served for a few years as third vice president.²⁸ In the early years of the League Miss Glasgow often shared with the members her travel experiences where they related to woman suffrage. As she traveled she had an opportunity to speak with prominent suffragists in the United States and abroad.²⁹ "Miss Ellen Glasgow, just returned from Colorado, gave an account [to a League meeting] of suffragists' accomplishments in that State."³⁰

Miss Glasgow's interest and participation in League activities continued during her productive years as a

²⁶Ibid., p. 187.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Equal Suffrage League of Virginia Yearbook, 1910 (Richmond, Virginia, 1910), p. 2.

²⁹Times Dispatch, November 14, 1909, p. D11.

³⁰Ibid., November 21, 1909, p. 11.

novelist. In a speech before the League convention in 1919 her topic was the changing times.

Times have changed and times will change; the whole of creation is moving toward a predestined goal. I should love to have lived in Virginia fifty years before the Civil War. But fate ordered it otherwise. And I cannot today apply conditions of one hundred years ago. Neither can the state of Virginia.

He fights a losing fight who goes out to fight the future, and however much we may like the minuet, we can hardly dance it when the orchestra is playing the fox trot. 'There is but one thing stronger than armies, and that is an idea whose hour has come.' This expression was the last penned by Victor Hugo, and is among the truest and greatest thoughts of all time.³¹

The audience received her speech enthusiastically, but it would be a year before the General Assembly of Virginia would even listen to the "fox trot."

Perhaps Ellen Glasgow's greatest contribution to woman's rights came through her novels. These books reflect a feminism which, defined in modern fiction, is "an expression of woman's desire 'to be herself'; that is, to measure attainment irrespective of sexual function."³² Throughout her literary career Ellen Glasgow displayed an insistent feminism. Her woman characters most often provide the theme of the novel, even when the plot centers around the male hero. It is the women, Gabriella Carr,

³¹Woman Suffrage Papers, Box 1.

³²Josephine Lurie Jessup, The Faith of Our Feminists (New York: Richard R. Smith Publisher, Inc., 1950), p. 10.

Dorinda Oakley, and Eva Birdsong,³³ who are shown to be the moral and intellectual superiors of the men who deserted them. They survive and grow stronger. "The man is essentially a drone."³⁴

At one point Miss Glasgow wrote a poem which did not bring her literary acclaim, but did express her feelings for the sisterhood of women.

The Call

Woman called to woman at the daybreak!
 When the bosom of the deep was stirred,
 In the gold of dawn and in the silence,
 Woman called to woman and was heard!

Steadfast as the dawning of the polestar,
 Secret as the fading of the breath;
 At the gate of Birth we stood together,
 Still together at the gate of Death.

Queen or slave or bond or free, we battled,
 Bartered not our faith for love or gold.
 Man we served, but in the hour of anguish
 Woman called to woman as of old.

Hidden at the heart of earth we waited,
 Watchful, patient, silent, secret, true;
 All the terrors of the chains that bound us
 Man has seen, but only woman knew!

Woman knew! Yea, still, and woman knoweth!--
 Thick the shadows of our prison lay--
 Yet that knowledge in our hearts we treasure
 Till the dawning of the perfect day.

Onward now as in the long, dim ages,
 Onward to the light where Freedom lies;
 Woman calls to woman to awaken!
 Woman calls to woman to arise!³⁵

³³The women appear in the novels Life and Gabriella, Barren Ground and The Sheltered Life.

³⁴Jessup, p. 46 and passim.

³⁵Woman Suffrage Papers, Box 3. Also, Collier's Magazine, XLIX (July 27, 1912), p. 21.

(3)

Not as well known today as Ellen Glasgow, but nonetheless a prolific writer of romance novels, Mary Johnston became the penwoman and orator for the Equal Suffrage League movement. She was also a native Virginian, eldest of the six children of John William and Elizabeth Dixon (Alexander) Johnston. She was born at Buchanan in Botetourt County and the family later moved to Richmond where her father was a lawyer and state legislator, and later president of the Georgia Pacific Railroad Company. Mary was a frail child and was educated largely at home, tutored by governesses and reading extensively in her father's library.³⁶ When the family's finances were affected by a series of problems and reverses, Mary put this accumulated knowledge to use by writing and publishing the first of her historical novels in 1898.

This knowledge and creative expression would later be employed in the struggle for woman's rights, but in the very early days of the Virginia suffrage organization Miss Johnston disclaimed any connection with the newly formed group. She said that she believed in restricted suffrage, but not on grounds of sex. This disclaimer was perhaps prompted by the feeling that speaking out for woman

³⁶Edward T. James and Janet Wilson James (eds.), "Mary Johnston," Notable American Women, 1607-1950, Vol. II, p. 282.

suffrage was not "the thing to do" in Richmond society. Indeed, the women were faced with rumors which "arose from the 'better' Richmond parlors as though from a miasmic jungle."³⁷ Later, with Mrs. Valentine and her friend Ellen Glasgow as examples, she joined enthusiastically into the work of the League, and even "interrupted the production of her romantic novels to write Hagar (a contemporary novel with New York City as its setting) in support of the woman suffrage movement."³⁸ She also wrote articles for the Richmond Times Dispatch, and spoke to many groups within the state, including the privileges and elections committee of the General Assembly. Her speaking tour also carried her outside the Commonwealth to the legislatures of Tennessee and West Virginia, and to the conference of the governors of all the states of the Union.³⁹ With her speech notes she also carried with her the Virginia tradition of gentility, for she too abhorred the very idea of militancy. "It is as counter to my judgement as it is repugnant to my taste."⁴⁰

It is from Mary Johnston's pen that we are given a rare first-hand account of one of the early meetings (1910)

³⁷quoted in Godbold, p. 91.

³⁸Elizabeth Dabney Coleman, "Penwoman of Virginia's Feminists," Virginia Cavalcade, VI, No. 3 (Winter, 1956), p. 8.

³⁹Ibid., p. 9.

⁴⁰Times Dispatch, November 15, 1909, p. 8.

of the Richmond Equal Suffrage League. She describes an atmosphere of mind as well as of place which is helpful in understanding these women.

This meeting was held in a small, old-time parlor rented by the League for the nursery of their Idea.

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There were present perhaps twenty-five women. The League is larger than that, but for one reason or another many could not attend. It was late in the afternoon, and the room not brightly lit. . . . A few of the women were young, one or two were elderly, but the most [sic] were in the middle of life. . . . All sat in a circle around the room, in the fire-light and the shadow. There were reports--a hundred and odd dollars in the treasury, so many pamphlets distributed, so many new members; then, business over, here and there, out of the red-brown shadow, a woman spoke, diffidently, keeping her seat, somewhat confused, for in the South we are not used to woman's speaking--not, certainly, on the present subject.⁴¹

Miss Johnston also served the woman's rights movement as an effective propagandist. She wrote that she had

never seen the reason why she, as well as her neighbors, the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker, the chief cook and bottle washer, and her neighbors of tomorrow, the male Sicilian and the Slav, should not have a voice in her community and State as to taxation, as to what ideals of government can be made real and what not, as to the welfare in general of that society of which I am, indubitably, a member.⁴²

Her reference to the butcher, et cetera, obviously meant any condition or quality of person, so long as he was male, but her reference to the Sicilian and the Slav was

⁴¹Mary Johnston, "The Woman's War," The Atlantic Monthly, CV (April, 1910), p. 559.

⁴²Times Dispatch, November 15, 1909, p. 8.

more subtle. She was writing at a time when there was a general distrust of the immigrant, and when those from eastern Europe and southern Italy were considered to be particularly objectionable.⁴³ If the privilege of suffrage were entrusted to such as those, by what right could it be denied to women? She had in mind especially those women like herself. "Her family had been native to the commonwealth for generations, had fought in its wars, had cultivated its soil, and had assisted in erecting its public works."⁴⁴ Her efforts in persuasion were a help to the League, but may have been a personal hindrance. Her fellow writer of popular novels, Thomas Nelson Page, advised her to "stick to what you do so well. Thousands of others can vote, but only you write Romances."⁴⁵

All three of these women made substantial though different contributions to the advocacy of woman's rights. The many similarities in their backgrounds and personal lives are worth pointing out because they make an

⁴³Richard Hofstadter, William Miller and Daniel Aaron, The United States: The History of a Republic (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1957), pp. 519-520.

⁴⁴Coleman, "Penwoman of Virginia's Feminists," p. 11.

⁴⁵John R. Roberson (ed.), "Two Virginia Novelists on Woman's Suffrage: An Exchange of Letters between Mary Johnston and Thomas Nelson Page," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, LXIV (1956), p. 290.

interesting case study of the Virginia middle class woman of the early 1900's. All three were native Virginians who could trace their families through several generations of participation in the life of the state. Ellen Glasgow and Mary Johnston suffered from poor health as children and were troubled with various afflictions as adults; Lila Meade Valentine gave birth to a stillborn child in 1888 and never fully recovered from the subsequent surgery. Education at home and interest in reading books of all kinds, including history and science, was another common denominator. Genteel poverty was a fact of life for these Virginia ladies until the marriage of one and the literary success of the other two brought financial security. All three women had traveled abroad, especially in England, in the 1890's and early 1900's where they were exposed to liberal reform movements and the woman's rights issue.⁴⁶ All three women lived in Richmond and were middle aged when they took up the cause of woman suffrage in Virginia. Mrs. Valentine, though married, was childless and therefore could choose, as could Ellen Glasgow and Mary Johnston, to spend a good portion of her time on matters outside of the home. Each woman, like the others in many ways and yet possessing an individual personality, worked for the improvement of woman's position in Virginia as her own

⁴⁶Notable American Women, 1607-1950, Vol. II, p. 283;
Notable American Women, 1607-1950, Vol. III, p. 505;
Glasgow, p. 119, 186.

disposition and talents allowed. As personal representatives of this idea, they were successful.

(4)

Under the leadership of Mrs. Valentine the women of Virginia went to work not only for woman's rights, but also in other major areas of reform, notably those regarding the safety and well-being of women and children, general labor and economic reform, public health, and education. In the interest of a better life for women and children, reform was advocated in factory working conditions, the legal status of children before the law, improvement in prison conditions, and equal wages for equal work. All of these goals were reflections of the social concerns of progressive movement. They were endorsed by the NAWSA as examples of the good that women could bring about once they were enfranchised, and were thus legitimate areas of activity for the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia. Virginia women were not just speaking out for a broad, national idea in their participation in the reform movement, however. They looked about them in their own state and found situations which needed remedying. Then, by working with state legislators, they set about the task of trying to solve some problems and avert others. In 1910, the League advocated the passage in the General Assembly of three bills dealing with juvenile delinquency, contributory delinquency on the

part of parents, and nonsupport of wife and children by a husband; and helped to block the introduction of a bill to increase the working hours of women and children in factories.⁴⁷ The general labor reforms of the eight-hour working day and a minimum wage law were part of the early League program, and were still being advocated in 1918.⁴⁸ In the area of public health, women in 1910 helped to defeat a bill to lower the standard of milk sold in Virginia municipalities.⁴⁹ In 1917, speakers discussed work in the antituberculosis campaign, and the League reaffirmed its support of "national health legislation with competent enforcement."⁵⁰

Achieving a higher education of good quality was a difficult attainment for Southern women. Normal schools, or teacher training schools, were primarily vocational. Colleges of high standards, as recognized by the Southern Association of College Women, were mostly in the North, with only four in the South.

The outside colleges included Smith, Vassar, Wellesley, Bryn Mawr, Radcliff, Michigan and Swarthmore, among others. The four southern colleges which entitled a woman to membership were Agnes Scott, Goucher, Randolph-Macon, and Sophie Newcomb.⁵¹

⁴⁷Coleman, "Penwoman of Virginia's Feminists," p. 9.

⁴⁸Woman Suffrage Papers, Box 1.

⁴⁹Coleman, "Penwoman of Virginia's Feminists," p. 9.

⁵⁰Woman Suffrage Papers, Box 1.

⁵¹Anne Firor Scott, The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930 (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 115.

Attendance at any of these institutions would have been an expense not many Virginia families could afford to bear for a daughter, especially if there were sons to educate. Recognizing this problem, the Equal Suffrage League regularly called for compulsory statewide education and a woman's annex to the University of Virginia in their annual resolutions.⁵² In regard to the annex to the University, the woman ran into stiff opposition from the alumni. It was said that the University was "historically the educational centre of the South, as well as of Virginia, and is the most sacred of all State institutions, and as such the repository of many of its most cherished traditions."⁵³ The very idea of women invading this male preserve was an anathema to many alumni, and they equated the occurrence with something like the downfall of civilization itself.

Her [woman's] indelicacy in seeking to intrude among men proves to him that she must be protected from herself, at the same time this alma mater and the ideals of his State are saved from incalculable harm.⁵⁴

In consideration of the general idea of higher education, though, women did obtain support from the State Superintendent of Schools, R. C. Stearnes. At the annual

⁵²Woman Suffrage Papers, Box 1.

⁵³Orie Latham Hatcher, "The Virginia Man and the New Era for Women," Nation, Vol. 106 (June 1, 1918), p. 652.

⁵⁴Ibid.

meeting of the Virginia Education Conference at Roanoke in 1917, Mr. Stearnes said,

so important is this duty of training teachers, that the primary schools need better high schools to train their teachers, and a woman's college to set the standards for training high school teachers, more than they need a million dollars a year of additional revenue.⁵⁵

The need to educate women in the theory and function of government, if they were to be responsible voting citizens, also drew the attention of the Equal Suffrage League. To this end the League conducted a "Suffrage School" at the state headquarters in Richmond in January, 1917. The school was held for one week and had an enrollment of one hundred members.⁵⁶ A similar school was held after enfranchisement, on November 21-22, 1921. This school of government, the "Conference on Governmental Efficiency," was called by Governor Westmoreland Davis at the request of the Virginia League of Women Voters (an outgrowth of the Equal Suffrage League), and was held at the Hall of the House of Delegates in Richmond. The topics discussed were:

1. State administration,
2. Accomplishments of city manager government in Virginia,
3. The teaching of government,
4. Problems of county government in Virginia,
5. Steps in governmental efficiency in Virginia,

⁵⁵Times Dispatch, December 2, 1917, p. 7.

⁵⁶Woman Suffrage Papers, Box 1.

6. Methods of introducing civil service into state government,
7. State efficiency in child care,
8. Efficiency in police administration,
9. Economics of efficient government,
10. Improved primary legislation.⁵⁷

In its arguments for suffrage, the League emphasized the theory of human progress which meant that "the full emancipation of women in the future"⁵⁸ was inevitable. But in order to hasten this along it raised the old cry of "taxation without representation." The League pointed out that many women, widows or working women, handled their own business affairs, owned property, and paid taxes. It was only right that they should have an equal voice with a male head of the family in how the tax dollars were to be used. The League also referred to the earliest request for woman suffrage recorded in Virginia, in 1778, when Hannah Lee Corbin of Gloucester County wrote to her brother, Richard Henry Lee, asking why she, a taxpayer, could not vote. Lee answered that "in his opinion under the clause in the Constitution which gave the vote to householders she could exercise the suffrage."⁵⁹

Another approach taken by the League to advance its program was political. In 1916 the Democratic platform

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Coleman, "Genteel Crusader," p. 11.

⁵⁹Ida Husted Harper (ed.), History of Woman Suffrage, Vol. VI, p. 665.

included a plank "favoring 'the extension of suffrage to women, state by state, on the same terms as men.'"⁶⁰

Richmond League members interviewed candidates for nomination at the August primary as to their stand on their party platform.

Most of them appeared to be under the impression that being a National Party Platform, it did not concern them. When asked if they preferred to have the question treated nationally, they did not appear to know just what they did prefer.⁶¹ Several, however, were favorably disposed.

During the summer, a committee from the Richmond League attended all political meetings in Richmond before the primary and were given a hearing at each meeting.

Suffragist literature was distributed at the polls in August. Virginia women were displaying not only an interest in obtaining the right to vote, but a good deal of political acumen.

To gain support for the many programs in which they were engaged, women wrote articles for the newspapers, published informative tracts, and spoke to organizations and associations around the state, including such diverse groups as the committees of the General Assembly, school boards, the Virginia Road Builders Association, civic clubs, the State Corn Growers Association, and the national

⁶⁰ Eleanor Flexner, Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 278.

⁶¹ Woman Suffrage Papers, Box 1.

convention of Ice Manufacturers.⁶² Often their words seemed to have little or no effect, but they persevered. Some women came to be known as "speakers" for the League. Mary Johnston, in particular, overcame the obstacle of timidity and a soft voice to speak out for woman's rights.

When war came in 1917, the Equal Suffrage League "offered its services to President Wilson and Governor [Henry C.] Stuart in the cause of war."⁶³ A campaign to promote backyard gardens and the conservation of their products was begun, and information on the growing and canning of vegetables was printed and distributed. League members set the example by planting their own gardens. Individuals of the organization in Richmond who were doing Red Cross sewing and knitting coordinated their work by forming their own Red Cross Auxiliary. Many League meetings were conducted with an accompaniment of clicking knitting needles.⁶⁴ When the report of an increase of 7,000 members for the past year was read in December of 1917, the following comment was offered in explanation. "This gain is said to be the natural outcome of progress, and is not due to any concerted effort for increased membership, the energies of all suffragists having been concentrated upon all forms of war service."⁶⁵

⁶²Woman Suffrage Papers, Box 1.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Times Dispatch, December 3, 1917, p. 10.

Such an emphasis was given to the war effort as a natural result of a desire to aid the nation in a time of crisis, but also to show that women, as well as men, could be of service in wartime. Virginia women were also assuming what they considered to be their civic responsibility. They had shown a capacity for organizing and for carrying out a plan of action which made them an effective voice for change and reform. Their activities were regularly reported in the newspapers and the names of the leaders of the Equal Suffrage League became known to the men of the General Assembly and to people across the state. The Virginia women who worked for suffrage and for woman's rights were serious about their task.

CHAPTER III

OPPOSING FORCES

(1)

Opposition to woman's rights took many forms, although the Negro question appeared to dominate the field in the South.

In the South the source of sentiment lay in the fear of the Negro vote--in fear of strengthening any attempts to overthrow the system of Jim Crow restrictions (including the poll tax) which, in defiance of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, disfranchised the colored population.¹

It was believed that women, if given the right to vote, might force integrity in government, since they had been saying that one of their aims was "to clean up politics."² The association in people's minds of woman's rights and Negro rights worked to the detriment of woman suffrage. Some of the early advocates of woman's rights, such as Angelina and Sara Grimké, and Frederick Douglass, were better known as radical abolitionists.³ This tinge of

¹Eleanor Flexner, Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 295.

²Ibid.

³Martin Duberman (ed.), The Antislavery Vanguard (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 133.

abolitionism remained to haunt the suffrage movement in the twentieth century. Opposition came from the United Daughters of the Confederacy: giving women the vote would "bring the revival of Negro rule in the South,"⁴ since Negro women supposedly outnumbered white women. This point was openly discussed in the Congress of the United States. Amendments were several times offered to the Woman Suffrage Bill to limit voting to white women only, but all such efforts failed.⁵

In Virginia forceful opposition was raised over the race issue and Negro woman suffrage, although this was not always stated outright. In a 1912 petition to the House Privileges and Elections Committee, a group of women "antis"⁶ alluded to this issue when they stated that

we know that conditions render such an amendment [to the State Constitution] inexpedient and dangerous in the State, conditions which do not exist in any female suffrage State or country in the world. It has seemed to us that true patriotism would not seek to aggravate this troublous problem.⁷

At this time, only a few far western states with small Negro populations had woman suffrage. Some Virginians, however, expressed quite clearly their opposition to woman suffrage in terms that were emphatic, if rather amusing.

⁴Lloyd Chamberlain Taylor, "Lila Meade Valentine: The FFV as Reformer," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, LXX (1962), p. 482.

⁵Congressional Record, 65th Congress, 2nd Session, Vol. 56, Part 2, p. 10981; and, 66th Congress, 1st Session, Vol. 58, Part 1, p. 618.

⁶This is the term applied to antisuffragists.

⁷Times Dispatch (Richmond, Virginia), January 19, 1912, p. 7.

No daughter of the Confederacy will be a suffragette. No veteran will permit female Negro suffrage--if it brings on another war. For when the cook comes to the meeting and puts on her bonnet quick, and goes to the polls and votes for Dr. Booker T. Washington as President of the United States, or 'you gets another cook,' and the women will be in the saddle with sabre and pistol galore.⁸

The Negro question had a more serious side. Using the census of 1910 for the most recent statistics and assuming no material change in the character of the population, facts and figures were brought together by the Virginia Advisory Committee Opposed to Woman Suffrage in opposition to the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment. In a pamphlet entitled "The Virginia General Assembly and Woman's Suffrage" this committee presented a table showing the number of persons of voting age in the state. (See Table 1.) Using the figures shown in Table 1, the committee argued that Negroes, voting solidly as was their custom, could control the local governments and representations in the Assembly in twenty-seven counties.⁹ They would also hold the balance of power across the state and would "be able

⁸Ibid., November 10, 1911, p. 4. Quoting a member of the United Daughters of the Confederacy.

⁹The counties were Amelia, Brunswick, Charles City, Cumberland, Charlotte, Dinwiddie, Essex, Goochland, Greenville, King and Queen, King William, Lancaster, Lunenburg, Mecklenburg, Middlesex, Nansemond, Northampton, Norfolk, New Kent, Nottoway, Powhatan, Prince Edward, Prince George, Southampton, Surry, Sussex, and York.

Table 1
Persons of Voting Age in Virginia in 1910

Race/Sex	Number
White Males	374,339
White Females	353,516
Colored Males	159,593
Colored Females	164,844
Total whites of voting age, both sexes	727,855
Total colored of voting age, both sexes	323,437
White majority	404,418

SOURCE: Westmoreland Davis Papers, Pamphlet, p. 4, University of Virginia Library, Manuscripts Department, Box 82.

to decide always hereafter any matter on which there is difference among white people."¹⁰

Another forceful argument put forth by the committee was that woman suffrage would invite revival of the Fifteenth Amendment and "would force us back to the methods from which we delivered ourselves [in the 1902 Constitutional Convention] with so much thought and

¹⁰Westmoreland Davis Papers, University of Virginia Library, Manuscripts Department, Box 82. [Hereafter referred to as Davis Papers.] An undated pamphlet by the Advisory Committee Opposed to Woman Suffrage, "The General Assembly and Woman Suffrage," p. 7.

pains."¹¹ In addition, the warning was given (though not substantiated) that:

Republican leaders, in and out of Congress, openly and bitterly threaten to force the Southern States to grant full and equal suffrage to the Negroes, of both sexes, or to reduce representation to the [proportion] the vote actually cast bears to the total vote of the country. This would leave Virginia four representatives in the lower house of Congress, instead of ten, and cut her vote in the electoral college by half.¹²

These arguments, combining the emotional and the practical aspects of the Negro question, formed a large part of the opposition faced by the Virginia Equal Suffrage League.

An entirely different aspect of opposition can be found in the "antis"--the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, which was founded in 1911. Their main argument was that woman's place was in the home, and that women "did not need political suffrage since their menfolk represented them and cared for their interests."¹³ This line of opposition may have won some adherents, but in an era of social transition and change in the status of women, it is likely that the antis mainly "furnished legislators with the excuse that a body of respectable women did not want the vote."¹⁴ A letter to the editor of the Richmond Times Dispatch, however, shows that the antis' line of

¹¹Ibid., p. 5.

¹²Ibid., p. 6.

¹³Flexner, p. 296.

¹⁴Ibid.

reasoning had its supporters in Virginia. A reader discussed the "serious consequences" of giving the ballot to women. In going to the polling places, a woman "would encounter the rough, coarse elements of human life." Such an exposure would go far in destroying woman's innate gentleness and modesty. "If the queen of the home, the one who gives it its greater charm, leaves its quiet restraints to enter public life, then farewell to our homes."¹⁵

Other expressions of the "woman's place is in the home" can be found in these arguments. "Our men: superbly brave enough to die for us in France, yet not good enough to vote for us at home! Oh, the base ingratitude of some women." If a woman votes, then she will have to serve on jury duty. If her child becomes sick her attention will be "distracted away from the case in court," or consider her embarrassment if an "indecent case" is being tried.¹⁶ The question was also asked (and answered),

What is it woman wants? . . . A voice in the government? To her care are committed the young statesman who are to administer law and equity, and legislate according to the sentiments and precepts taught them at the mother's knee.¹⁷

¹⁵Times Dispatch, December 5, 1909, p. C4.

¹⁶Davis Papers, handouts.

¹⁷Taylor, p. 484.

Another argument, that of states' rights, was heard once again in Virginia; one of those rights "to be reserved for the States was that of deciding for themselves according to their varying circumstances and conditions, who should and who should not vote within their borders and under their laws."¹⁸ This right was considered to be threatened by the woman suffrage amendment and by certain national leaders who were interfering in Virginia's affairs. The president of the Virginia Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, Mrs. F. D. Williams of Richmond, wrote to Governor Westmoreland Davis complaining of the interference of President Wilson and the Chairman of the National Democratic Party, who supported woman's right to vote. She said that this issue "which is so vital to the rights and interests of Virginia is suddenly changed to the question of the interests of the National Democratic Party,"¹⁹ and implied that the state should have none of it.

Virginia woman suffrage advocates became used to the general opposition as exhibited in the Negro issue, and in the idea that women belonged in the home under the protection and guardianship of their male relatives. As will be shown later they mounted an effective campaign to combat these arguments. Other types of opposition confronted

¹⁸Davis Papers, Pamphlet, p. 5.

¹⁹Davis Papers, undated letter.

the members of the Equal Suffrage League, however, and these were probably harder to deal with. Indifference and the refusal of some men to take them seriously were met with renewed efforts for the success of their programs in the General Assembly and with letter-writing campaigns.²⁰ Ridicule, such as that leveled at Mrs. Valentine, could only be ignored.

Pray tell me Madame Valentine. . .how can the sovereign state of Virginia enfranchise you without at the same swoop of the pen, giving the ballot equally to the Aunt Dinah's, Aunt Judah's and others of that race, color, or previous conditions of servitude. Cannot they, or most of them write and register as well as Madame? . . . Imagine, our esteemed Madame Valentine and the aforesaid Aunt Judy familiarly elbowing each other at a democratic convention, or gathering. The great God forbid it! dear, dear--(pardon my moderation) sister Valentine.²¹

The opposition faced by the women of Virginia was similar to that confronting suffragists across the South, and yet for each woman it was a personal experience. They seemed to have borne it well.

(2)

The history of legislative opposition to woman suffrage in Virginia was long and consistent. In 1912,

²⁰Virginia Woman Suffrage Papers, 1910-1925, Virginia State Library, Archives Division, Box 1. [Hereafter referred to as Woman Suffrage Papers.]

²¹Judge R. L. Gardner to Pulaski. Southwest Times and News, June 16, 1916. Quoted by Taylor, p. 486.

the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia advocated the proposal of a bill to the General Assembly to amend the state Constitution to enfranchise women. Such a bill was first presented by Hill Montague, delegate from Richmond. He was convinced "that women have the same moral and ethical right to vote as men,"²² but was not optimistic about the passage of the bill in that Assembly. He anticipated much opposition and said that for a time the advocates of woman suffrage would have to go "against the current of public opinion."²³ During the first few weeks of the legislative session, Equal Suffrage League members across the state wrote letters and sent petitions to their delegates to draw attention to the suffrage amendment. So much mail arrived, in fact, that the conservative Richmond Times Dispatch concluded that

Woman's suffrage seems to have passed the stage of being legitimate matter for jokes, and, from the business-like manner in which it is being agitated, bids fair to take rank with the big questions which are before the lawmakers.²⁴

The House Committee on Privileges and Elections, acting upon the urging of a delegation of League members led by state president Mrs. Valentine, moved to hold a public hearing on the proposed amendment on Friday, January 19, 1912. On the morning of the hearing, Chairman Martin

²²Times Dispatch, December 18, 1911, p. 10.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., January 11, 1912, p. 7.

Williams received a petition from a group of intelligent and literate women who were opposed to the suffrage legislation,²⁵ but aside from this, the suffragists carried the day. The hall of the House of Delegates was filled with an "immense crowd, probably the largest which ever gathered"²⁶ there. The meeting, which began at four o'clock, had to adjourn at six and reassemble at eight in the evening in order for all of the speakers to be heard. Logical, well-reasoned arguments were put forth by men and women in favor of the amendment. Labor representatives H. T. Colvin of Alexandria and E. C. Davidson, secretary of the State Federation of Labor, said that "organized labor demands the ballot for women."²⁷ Not a single voice of opposition had been heard when Chairman Williams closed the meeting with the announcement that the whole proposition would be submitted to the Committee on Monday. The Committee met in secret session for only a few minutes on January 22 and voted to recommend that the suffrage bill should not pass.²⁸ The Senate Committee met on January 29 to consider a similar bill presented by Senator E. Lee Trinkle of Wythe. The legislators

²⁵Ibid., January 19, 1912, p. 7.

²⁶Ibid., January 20, 1912, p. 1.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid., January 23, 1912, p. 1.

"listened respectfully" for two and one-half hours to the "impassioned appeal and patient pleading"²⁹ of the advocates of woman's suffrage, and then voted without a dissenting voice to reject the measure. The opposition which Delegate Montague had foreseen was then in evidence, but no explanation was given for their objections.

The Equal Suffrage League accepted this defeat and determined to carry on the fight in the next Assembly. The 1914 legislature was busy with tax reform and gave the renewed woman's rights bill only a cursory hearing.³⁰ This situation was repeated in the General Assembly two years later, and in 1918 the women themselves did not press for an amendment as the attention of the Equal Suffrage League was temporarily directed to wartime issues.³¹ By the summer of 1919, the question of woman's suffrage was no longer that of an amendment to the Virginia Constitution. On June 4, 1919, the United States Senate passed the federal woman suffrage bill (the House passed it on May 20), and the Nineteenth Amendment was sent to the states for ratification.³²

²⁹Ibid., January 30, 1912, p. 1.

³⁰Ibid., January 17, 1914, p. 3.

³¹Woman Suffrage Papers, Box 1. Announcements of activities sent out by the League headquarters.

³²Flexner, p. 314.

What was the nature of the legislative opposition which was so consistent and relatively silent during the years following 1912 when the woman suffrage measure was first introduced in Virginia? Undoubtedly, some of the objections of the lawmakers were similar to those generally being voiced throughout the state. Most or all of these objections to the enfranchisement of women were probably known to the Assemblymen, but the two most important reasons for opposition lay beneath the surface of this general discussion; one was "the real fear in Virginia and the South . . . that in enforcing the Nineteenth Amendment the federal government would also enforce the Fifteenth"³³ which gave the Negro the vote. Virginia's Constitution of 1902 had effectively disfranchised him. This argument was not brought out into the open until 1919 when the Virginia Advisory Committee Opposed to Woman Suffrage published its pamphlet. The other major objection was tied to the "belief that absolute Democratic supremacy was required for the development of a prosperous and harmonious Virginia."³⁴ This "absolute Democratic supremacy" was achieved through a small, controlled electorate, which was also a product of the suffrage

³³Allen W. Moger, Virginia: Bourbonism to Byrd, 1870-1925 (Charlottesville, Virginia: The University Press of Virginia, 1968), p. 328.

³⁴Raymond H. Pulley, Old Virginia Restored: An Interpretation of the Progressive Impulse, 1870-1930 (Charlottesville, Virginia: The University Press of Virginia, 1968), p. 118.

requirements of the 1902 Constitution. Bringing women voters into the electorate might well throw the party machine temporarily out of order. As an astute political commentator for the Richmond Times Dispatch observed during the 1912 public hearings on the woman suffrage question,

the old-line politician has pretty well mastered the science of controlling or persuading the electorate as now constituted, and he is inclined to hesitate to inject a new, large and supposedly uncertain element into the equation.³⁵

Considering the importance given to the need for a controlled electorate during the equal suffrage amendment debates in the General Assembly, it would be well to discover just why such control was deemed necessary.

Virginia had come back into the Union on July 6, 1869, when the voters accepted the liberal Underwood constitution with blanket manhood suffrage as the price of their restoration. Virginians "did not vote for Negro suffrage. They voted to accept it, because the alternative appeared to be Negro rule under the leadership of radical Republicans."³⁶ In the same election in which the Underwood constitution was accepted, a majority of Conservative candidates was elected to the General Assembly. Although the constitution had been constructed by radicals under military rule, its interpretation and application were in

³⁵Times Dispatch, January 20, 1912, p. 7.

³⁶Charles E. Wynes, Race Relations in Virginia, 1870-1902 (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 1961), p. 4.

the hands of white conservatives.³⁷ The problems facing this new government were those of "economic progress and the material interests of sections and men,"³⁸ and the policies determined would greatly affect the course of political life in Virginia for the next three decades. This conservative leadership found itself saddled with an indebtedness which was increasing at the rate of one million dollars a year. As a result, many programs had to be curtailed and some schools were shut down, many of them for Negroes.³⁹ This situation brought into being an opposition party pledged to readjust the state debt,⁴⁰ which campaigned with appeals to the Negro voter. For the rest of the century election fraud became commonplace with the buying of Negro votes or the cry of "Negro rule" accompanying the stuffed ballot box.⁴¹

By 1900, people were tired of the demoralizing election frauds "which they had been forced to countenance in order to retain white supremacy."⁴² In 1898, the Supreme Court had upheld Mississippi's Constitution with

³⁷Moger, p. 12.

³⁸Ibid., p. 13.

³⁹Pulley, p. 33.

⁴⁰The Readjuster Party.

⁴¹Pulley, pp. 33-47.

⁴²Moger, p. 182.

its clauses disfranchising the Negro. Virginians now felt free to hold a constitutional convention and legally eliminate the Negro from the polls. The suffrage clauses of the 1902 Constitution did, for all practical purposes, disfranchise the Negro, but these same clauses, in order to avoid the appearance of racism, also disfranchised the poor and illiterate white man. In addition to eliminating the reason for election fraud, the reduced electorate also eliminated the Republican Party as a threat to the Democratic majority. Negroes had been Republican supporters, but so had the small farmers of the mountain regions, and these men were mostly illiterate. The Democratic Party was able easily to dominate the newly reduced electorate, and by using the closed party primary for selecting candidates and gauging "public opinion on important issues facing the state,"⁴³ the majority party was able to consolidate its position.

The power structure within the Democratic Party was also consolidated under the leadership of Thomas Staples Martin. Martin held one of Virginia's seats in the United States Senate and preferred to control state politics silently but persistently from behind the scenes. Senator Martin "was aware that his power was based on a controlled or restricted electorate, and . . . was confident that the system was best for the state."⁴⁴

⁴³Pulley, p. 90.

⁴⁴Moger, pp. 169, 353.

Martin had always been "primarily concerned with control and power rather than reform in state or nation,"⁴⁵ and thus his opposition to woman's suffrage was natural on two counts. Mrs. Valentine, leader of the state Equal Suffrage League, was known as a reformer, especially in the fields of education and public health. Her influence would conceivably be used in advocating programs which would be at variance with Martin's plans. In addition, there would be with woman suffrage, an enlarged, politically uncertain electorate. From his position in Washington as Senate majority leader, Senator Martin led his forces against the enfranchisement of women in what, from his point of view, was in the best interest of the state.

In the last analysis, perhaps the men of the Commonwealth were also concerned with Virginia's tradition of the gentility of womanhood. The prominent state leaders who called themselves the Virginia Advisory Committee Opposed to Woman Suffrage confessed that, because of the restrictive suffrage clauses in the 1902 Constitution, the majority of the delegates "were afraid to submit the Constitution as it is to the people and had to proclaim it."⁴⁶ This Committee was therefore against giving women the right to vote as it would "involve our white women in acts in which we were ashamed to have our men engaged."⁴⁷ This

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 351.

⁴⁶Davis Papers, Pamphlet, p. 8.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 5.

was chivalry of the old school, but many Virginia women thought that they should have the best of both worlds--chivalry and the ballot.

(3)

Opponents of woman's right to vote had often stated that there would be no adverse effects if equal suffrage were not obtained: good deeds would continue and good laws would be enacted, and taxes would remain the same. The opposition felt that defeat of the suffrage bill in 1912 "would be a disappointment to the suffragists, [but] they would really lose nothing by returning to the peace and happiness which has been, and still is, the heritage of Virginia women."⁴⁸ The Equal Suffrage League was aware of this attitude among its opponents and was careful to remain within the Virginia tradition of the quality and gentility of women in its policies and its actions. This did not mean, however, that the League members were shy and reticent. They had taken the initiative in forming their suffrage association and they were to keep that initiative in shaping programs, formulating policy, and in meeting opposition.

The League met the Negro question head on. Harry F. Byrd expressed a fear of Negro woman dominance as he understood "that negro women [could] vote in Virginia

⁴⁸Times Dispatch, January 22, 1912, p. 10.

without even an educational or poll tax requirement until the [state] Constitution is amended." He also said that the amendment procedure was lengthy and could take four years.⁴⁹ Another opinion was quickly sought, and Carter Glass replied that there was no danger that "any and all negro women could vote unless special amendments"⁵⁰ were added.

Evidence was marshalled to show that white supremacy would not be threatened. The State Constitution stated that the voter must pay a poll tax of one dollar and fifty cents "for the three years next preceding that in which he offers to register." White supremacy would actually increase "as there are comparatively few negroes who meet their money obligations three years in advance."⁵¹ Also, literacy tests would eliminate more Negroes as the illiteracy rate was 22 percent among Negroes and only 8 percent among whites. Another encouraging word came from Arkansas, where "no negro woman has attempted to vote, according to a statement by the Chairman of the Woman Voters League of Arkansas."⁵²

The Negro women in Virginia seem to have been quiet on the subject, but a clipping in the Negro Women

⁴⁹Woman Suffrage Papers, Box 1. Letter from Honorable H. F. Byrd to Mrs. E. Virginia Smith, December 4, 1919.

⁵⁰Ibid. Letter from Mrs. M. E. Pidgeon to Mrs. Valentine, January 6, 1920.

⁵¹Ibid. Printed handout.

⁵²Ibid.

Scrapbooks at Hampton Institute gives an indication of their position. Miss Nannie H. Burroughs of Washington, D.C., a nationally known Negro speaker, was quoted as saying, "Give the ballot to the negro woman, and she will win back for the race what has been lost by the misuse of it in the hands of the negro."⁵³

In answer to the state's rights argument, the whole case was shown to be inconsistent.

By the fact that Virginia makes citizenship in the United States the basis of her electorate, the women of Virginia are made the political inferiors of the newly assimilated foreigner naturalized by the Federal government and not by State law.⁵⁴

This hit at the argument aimed at the federal woman suffrage bill, which asserted that the state alone should decide who should vote.

The "antis" had accused the suffrage advocates of opposing the submission of the question of enfranchisement to the "free judgement of the voters at the polls." The League replied that for ten years they had sponsored such a referendum through an amendment to the State Constitution.⁵⁵

The Equal Suffrage League was not entirely on the defensive or committed wholly to answering the opposition.

⁵³Negro Women Scrapbooks, Volume 1A, Hampton Institute Library. Clipping, July 20, 1915.

⁵⁴Woman Suffrage Papers, Box 1. Printed copy of "Reply to Thomas Nelson Page."

⁵⁵Ibid. Printed handout.

The women also set out to create a favorable atmosphere and to win friends to their point of view. A 1920 report listing arguments in favor of the federal amendment included as positive results of woman suffrage, the statement that "when given the opportunity, women vote, and bring about better election practices as well as social and health legislation." The report also rather slyly stated that the "increased numbers of voters will also incidentally increase the funds available for school purposes."⁵⁶ Famous men such as Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and "Chancellor Wythe" were quoted on the general subject of woman suffrage, and in 1912 an essay contest was conducted for boys and girls aged thirteen to eighteen on the topic of equal suffrage. There was a fifty dollar first prize and all winning essays would be published in the newspapers.⁵⁷

Just for fun, with perhaps a touch of malice, there were slogans and songs such as this one:

If a lassie wants a ballot
To help run the town
And a lassie gets the ballot,
Need a laddie frown.
Many a laddie has the ballot,
Not so bright as I,
And many a laddie votes his ballot
Overcome with rye.
If a body pays the taxes,
Surely, you'll agree,
That a body earns the franchise,
Whether He or She.⁵⁸

⁵⁶Ibid. Brief for the Federal Suffrage Amendment.

⁵⁷Ibid. Box 3. Printed handout.

⁵⁸Ibid.

Prominent men such as Carter Glass and Bascomb Slemp⁵⁹ were enlisted by the suffrage advocates. Republican Slemp was particularly helpful with his party members in the General Assembly. The Republican vote in the 1919 special session was split, but "Mr. Slemp assured me [Mrs. M. E. Pidgeon] by telephone Wednesday morning that he was using his influence with them as individuals and believed that they would be a solid vote in January."⁶⁰

The women of the League learned early to keep up-to-date with the political scene and to put that knowledge to practical use. Mrs. Valentine had heard from Washington that "one or two of our Congressmen" had stated that they did not believe in the national amendment method of getting the vote, and that "the women of Virginia did not want to vote anyway. Moral: lose no time in converting the women in those Congressmen's districts."⁶¹ In 1918, Senator Martin was being nursed along with logical arguments and reasonable persuasions to try to win him over to the suffrage cause, when Alice Paul (a leader of the militant Woman's Party and not a Virginian) threw a wrench in the League machinery. She issued a statement to a Richmond

⁵⁹Slemp was the United States Congressman from the Ninth District from 1907 to 1922.

⁶⁰Woman Suffrage Papers, Box 1. Letter from Mrs. M. E. Pidgeon (acting as executive secretary of the Equal Suffrage League) to Mrs. C. C. Catt, September 5, 1919.

⁶¹Ibid. Letter from Mrs. Valentine to Mrs. C. E. Townsend [Norfolk, Virginia], January 11, 1915.

paper saying "she knew that Senator Martin would vote for the [woman suffrage] Amendment." He immediately replied in the Times Dispatch that "he would not vote for the Amendment, that he had never seen Alice Paul and that she had no right to make such a statement."⁶² The Virginia women knew that Miss Paul's timing and method were wrong, and started all over again with their reasonable approach.⁶³

The newspapers were used effectively to put out the reasonable persuasions to a wider audience. An editorial in 1917 issued an appeal from the Civic Association of Richmond, urging all potential voters to exercise the right of suffrage in the coming elections, and decried the fact that each year

half of the potential voters . . . voluntarily disqualify themselves for any voice whatever in the conduct of their own public affairs. [The editorial then concluded] . . . a citizen without the ballot is a citizen in name only.⁶⁴

Miss Adele Clark, one of the founders of the Equal Suffrage League, wrote thanking the editor for his editorial, and then took him to task for not recognizing women as "potential voters." Upon such democratic doctrines as the citizen with the ballot, as expressed in the editorial, were "founded the claim of women citizens for a voice in

⁶²Ibid., January 30, 1918.

⁶³Ibid. Letter from Senator Martin to C. E. Townsend, February 22, 1918.

⁶⁴Times Dispatch, December 2, 1917, p. B4.

their government." Miss Clark then called attention to the fact that half the citizens of Richmond were

involuntarily and arbitrarily disqualified for any voice in the conduct of their own public affairs . . . The irony of the situation is that the number of women enrolled in the Equal Suffrage League of Richmond, pleading for a voice in their government, exceeds the number of men who made use of the ballot in the election in Richmond on November 6, 1917.⁶⁵

Women in Virginia were prepared by 1919 to fight opposition and indifference with intelligence and with numbers. Perhaps more and more they were coming to see the situation as the "grandmother of suffragists" in 1909 had seen it.

I understand there is, or has been, a law excluding 'women, negroes, imbeciles and idiots' from the list of those entitled to have a say in public affairs, and there ought not to be a woman in the world who would not be glad to get out of such a class.⁶⁶

In general, women were saying (and providing living proof) that "intelligence, conscience, character, power to assume responsibility and to work the problem, are not confined to the male organism."⁶⁷

⁶⁵Ibid., December 5, 1917, p. 6.

⁶⁶Ibid., December 6, 1909, p. 10.

⁶⁷Ibid., November 15, 1909, quoting Miss Mary Johnston, p. 8.

CHAPTER IV

DEFEAT AND VICTORY

(1)

In 1919 the woman suffrage movement had come almost to the end of a long road. Little progress was made toward obtaining a federal amendment of enfranchisement until 1916 when the Democratic National Committee accepted a woman suffrage plank in the party platform.¹ President Wilson addressed the National American Woman Suffrage Association convention on September 9, 1916, and said in effect that he was in favor of the enfranchisement of women, but "he intimated rather broadly that he was still in favor of each state dealing with the question in a matter to suit itself."² The federal amendment did not receive the President's sanction until later, and it had only partial success in the Congress. At a special session on May 20, 1919, the President "once again recommended passage of the federal woman suffrage amendment. That same

¹Richard Hofstadter, William Miller and Daniel Aaron, The United States: The History of a Republic (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1957), pp. 519-520.

²Virginia Woman Suffrage Papers, 1910-1925, Virginia State Library, Archives Division, Box 1. [Hereafter referred to as Woman Suffrage Papers.] Newspaper clipping.

day the House re-passed the amendment."³ On June 4, the Senate finally passed the bill and the Nineteenth Amendment was sent to the states for ratification.

Virginia's Equal Suffrage League members prepared for the ratification struggle, but there appeared to be little hope of success. The General Assembly had politely listened to their arguments for years, and just as politely refused to consider an amendment. Also, U. S. Senators Thomas S. Martin and Claude A. Swanson had consistently voted against the federal amendment in Congress,⁴ and their influence was expected to be felt in Richmond. Even national suffrage leaders saw little possibility for the Old Dominion to come over to their side.⁵ Nevertheless, the discussion of equal suffrage soon began again in Virginia. A special session of the General Assembly was called in the summer of 1919 to deal with appropriations for highway funds, but the question of ratification was also considered.⁶ A bill to reject the amendment was tabled until the regular session in January, 1920. "The senate's negative action . . . leaves the suffrage

³Eleanor Flexner, Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 314.

⁴Congressional Record, 65th Congress, 1st session, Vol. 56, Part 1, p. 725, and Part 2, p. 10987; and 66th Congress, 1st session, Vol. 58, Part 1, pp. 634-635.

⁵Flexner, p. 316.

⁶Journal of the Senate of the Commonwealth of Virginia, 1919 Extra Session (Richmond, Virginia, 1919), p. 1.

situation, in the matter of record, with its status unchanged by the special session."⁷

The League began at once to work for ratification in January by seeking the election of suffrage friends in November. They wrote letters and requested a favorable vote on ratification. They sent out questionnaires to all senators and assemblymen concerning the federal amendment. The answers to these questions were recorded and the arguments given in opposition were listed in accordance with the number of times they appeared.

1. Negro vote: poll tax not applying to women.
2. Virginia will 'stand on her own two feet': not to be pushed by Federal Amendment.
3. Majority of Virginia women oppose suffrage.
4. Majority of women would have voted dry [on Prohibition].
5. Non-committal.
6. Will represent constituents' wishes.
7. Woman's place is in the home.⁸

When the regular session began in January, the stage was set for the final act. On January 24, 1920, the Leedy Bill,⁹ officially designated as Senate Joint Resolution No. 13, "Rejecting the proposed amendment to the Constitution of the United States on woman suffrage,"¹⁰ was presented to the Assembly. On February 6, 1920, when the

⁷Woman Suffrage Papers, Box 1. Newspaper clipping, probably Richmond Times Dispatch, August, 1919.

⁸Ibid. Newsletter, questionnaire, and reports.

⁹Sponsored by Colonel Robert F. Leedy of Luray, representing Page and Rappahannock counties in the House of Delegates.

¹⁰Journal of the Senate, 1920 (Richmond, Virginia, 1920), p. 65.

Leedy Bill came to the floor for action, Senator E. Lee Trinkle offered the following substitution: "A Joint Resolution Ratifying a proposed amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America." On the same day Senator Gravatt offered a substitution that would send the federal amendment to the electorate for ratification. Both substitutions were rejected.¹¹ At the evening session the resolution to reject the Nineteenth Amendment passed the Senate by a vote of 26 to 4.¹² On February 12, the House also passed the Leedy Bill, with 22 "ayes" to 16 "noes."¹³

In the event that the Nineteenth Amendment should be ratified nationally, the Assembly passed a "machinery act" to provide for women voters,¹⁴ but it was not until 1952 that Virginia actually ratified the amendment.¹⁵ There was something of a "comedy of errors" involved, however, and the Commonwealth was not officially listed among the ratifying states following this action by the legislature. The resolution conveying the action of the General Assembly to Washington must have been lost because it was never recorded. The error was not detected until 1968, when once again the General Assembly was

¹¹Ibid., p. 171.

¹²Ibid., p. 173.

¹³Ibid., p. 222.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 331.

¹⁵Senate Journal, 1952, p. 552.

Resolved . . . , That the Congress of the United States is memorialized to recognize the fact that the Commonwealth of Virginia has ratified the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States extending the right of suffrage to women.¹⁶

With the national ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment,¹⁷ "twenty-six million women of voting age [including those of Virginia] had been enfranchised,"¹⁸ but Virginia women had both won and lost in the struggle for suffrage. They could now register and vote, and be citizens in deed as well as in name, but they had not won the recognition of the men in the General Assembly of the Commonwealth.

(2)

In 1909, an editorial writer for the Richmond Times Dispatch asked the question, "What is there to the argument that the vote for women means the downfall of the home?" The line of reasoning which was used in answering this question was basically that having the right to vote had not turned all men into avid politicians, and there was no reason to believe that the enfranchisement of women would immediately see them

¹⁶Journal of the House of the Commonwealth of Virginia, 1968 (Richmond, Virginia, 1968), p. 410.

¹⁷Tennessee, the thirty-sixth and deciding state ratified on August 26, 1920.

¹⁸Flexner, p. 324.

converted into a sex of politicians, whose only interest in life would be to go off to some shadowy place like a 'club' directly after breakfast and there spend the day and half the night making slates, cooking up tickets and heatedly discussing reciprocity with the Philippines.¹⁹

Virginia suffrage advocates fully justified the faith in womanhood expressed in this article. They had declared a distaste for militancy when their organization was founded and they held to this attitude even under the frustrations of defeat and silent rejection at the hands of the legislature. During the ratification hearings in 1919 members of the national Woman's Party were present and pressed for an immediate vote on the Amendment. To the consternation of the Virginia women present, they "threatened men to the point of angering them regarding the coming [ratification] fight."²⁰ As seen in the hundreds of items--private letters, memoranda, handouts, articles, newsletters, newspaper reports--accumulated during its existence, the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia kept to its policy of reasonable persuasion with a gentility that even the "antis" could not fault. Since the actions of these women offered no basis for complaint, the author of the pamphlet published by the Advisory Committee Opposed to Woman Suffrage had to attack their motives, and he did so in a rather unkind and condescending way. He said that

¹⁹Times Dispatch (Richmond, Virginia), December 5, 1909, p. C4.

²⁰Woman Suffrage Papers, Box 1. Memorandum of the ratification hearing.

Virginia was being asked to put itself in the dangerous position of enlarging its Negro vote, and for what purpose?

To gratify the whims or satisfy the pleadings or escape the importunities of a small minority of women, many of them incited by unnatural and unwholesome restlessness and mere desire to carry a point, others by fantastic misunderstandings and vague, nervous longing for some kind of change and excitement, some new opportunity to do some vague, undefined thing--and all of them absolutely ignorant or heedless of practical facts and regardless of consequences.²¹

This method of belittling and putting down an opponent was never used by the League (as far as has been discovered), but this attitude is also found in other antisuffrage literature.

Although there is little or no information available for any kind of class or group analysis of the League membership, their letters from around the state do show that they were intelligent and literate. From all indications they were white, and probably the majority fitted into the middle economic class because they had leisure and money to travel to Richmond and to meetings in other cities. They were married and single and of unknown age. They were continually optimistic in spite of little concrete evidence of the advancement of their goals. Even after the General Assembly had refused to ratify the suffrage amendment in 1920, Mrs. Valentine was busy

²¹Westmoreland Davis Papers, University of Virginia Library, Manuscripts Department, Box 82. [Hereafter referred to as Davis Papers.] An undated pamphlet, p. 12.

organizing a citizenship school. She had talked with the professors at the University of Virginia and was "anxious to organize as soon as possible, courses in citizenship for the women of Virginia and suggested a two day's conference at the University in April."²² They made no excessive claims for themselves and what they could do with the ballot, but they gave their reform interests a high priority.²³

In one area of reform, however, League members were entirely conservative. There is no evidence that they desired racial equality or that they enlisted the support of Negro women. On the contrary, they went to great lengths to show that woman suffrage would actually increase white supremacy. As to why Negro women themselves did not become involved in the suffrage issue, one can only hazard a guess. There were certainly Negro women in Virginia who desired to vote. They must have known that the general tenor of feeling across the state was antagonistic toward the idea of their enfranchisement, and that their chances of winning the suffrage would be improved if they stayed in the background.

²²Woman Suffrage Papers, Box 1. Letter from Mrs. Valentine to Mrs. C. E. Townsend, February 25, 1920.

²³Ibid., Box 3. Bills before the 1918 General Assembly which were advocated by the Equal Suffrage League were:

1. Censorship of moving pictures.
2. Support of illegitimate children.
3. Protection of chaste females from seduction.
4. To establish a minimum wage commission and to provide for the determination of minimum wages for women and children.

One possible source of opposition to the entire idea of woman suffrage is found in the so-called "wet interests" or "liquor money." Only a few references to this opposition have been discovered in regard to the Virginia ratification struggle. One such reference is found in the reasons given by the members of the 1919 General Assembly for their opposition to woman suffrage. Listed in fourth place is the opinion that "the majority of women would have voted dry."²⁴ During the August ratification hearing, Mrs. M. E. Pidgeon reported that men and women from Maryland, representing liquor interests, were lobbying against ratification.²⁵ Colonel Leedy, who sponsored the bill to reject the Federal Amendment, was also considered to be "wet,"²⁶ but none of this evidence is sufficient to suggest that liquor money influenced the decision by the Commonwealth to reject woman suffrage.

The publication by the Advisory Committee Opposed to Woman Suffrage was particularly damaging to the suffrage cause. It was distributed during the fall of 1919 just before the ratification hearings. The arguments put forth, accompanied with facts and figures and written in such an assured manner, would strike a responsive note in the minds of many of the legislators. The Committee was

²⁴Ibid., Box 1.

²⁵Ibid., letter to Mrs. C. C. Catt, September 5, 1919.

²⁶Ibid.

composed of prominent Richmond men, including three members of the Valentine family, thus dealing an additional blow to the Equal Suffrage League.

Virginia women had both won and lost in the struggle for suffrage. With the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, they were enfranchised, but they had not won the recognition of the men in the General Assembly of the Commonwealth. Only four Senators had voted against the rejection of the federal amendment, and one was Senator E. Lee Trinkle, of Wythe, who had offered the first equal rights bill in the Virginia Senate in 1912.

In spite of achieving only a partial victory in the suffrage question, the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia was proved wholly correct in one aspect of their rationale. Their faith in the inevitability of reform which would lead to women's equal status with men had been justified. The winds of change were blowing, and Virginia would feel the effects of woman's changing social and political position, just as it had seen her economic position change when women went out of the home to work. The challenge to Virginia women to bring about reform was not fully met with the winning of suffrage, however. The women would now have to put feet to their words and see just what an enlarged electorate could accomplish.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The three major sources of primary material for this study were the Virginia Woman Suffrage Papers at the State Library, the Westmoreland Davis Papers at the University of Virginia, and the Richmond Times Dispatch. The Woman Suffrage Papers are a collection of material gathered together in the 1930's by Ida M. Thompson as part of a WPA project. The material fills six file drawer boxes and is organized only to the point that papers are to be found in Boxes 1 and 3. These papers include letters, records, telegrams, press clippings, and broadsheets which represent thirteen years of activity by the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia. Representing the other side of the woman suffrage question are the papers in the Westmoreland Davis collection, which are largely "anti" literature. Of special importance is the pamphlet published by the Virginia Advisory Committee Opposed to Woman Suffrage, which is the only copy available since the one at the State Library is lost. The Richmond Times Dispatch was selected for day-to-day coverage because it was the leading newspaper in the state and was at the hub of legislative activity. Both sides of the suffrage and reform issues were given fair coverage. It was interesting to note that news items

concerning woman suffrage gradually moved from relative obscurity to positions of prominence. The "Letters to the Editor" section was very helpful in that opinions of a wider range of people were aired. Other primary sources not recorded in the footnotes were read to obtain the flavor of the entire subject.

Of the histories of the woman suffrage movement, Eleanor Flexner's Century of Struggle and Aileen Kraditor's The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement were of most assistance in writing this paper. Illumination of the Virginia political scene was provided by Allen W. Moger and others. Valuable information was garnered from those authors who researched the lives of Lila Meade Valentine, Ellen Glasgow, and Mary Johnston. A special reference must be made to Anne Firor Scott, whose marvelous book The Southern Lady was published after I had begun this investigation. My own family has been in Virginia for generations, and as I began reading for this paper I got the impression that perhaps my knowledge of Virginia women was biased or even faulty. The Southern Lady banished such fears.

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